

the ant find the trail accidentally? (3) How did it know that the trail, although poisoned, was worth following? (4) How did the other ants know that the trail was in use again? There was no possibility of the first ant having communicated with the others, because there was not time for it to have reached the nest, and the ants came from both sides of the trail almost immediately, and not, as far as I could detect, from any side trails.

—C. B. PALMER, Bassendean.

Straw-necked Ibis Breeding at Coolup.—On May 14, 1949, I decided to investigate a report that the Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinicollis*) had bred in large numbers on a swamp about 12 miles south-west of Coolup. I was accompanied by Dr. D. L. Serventy and Mr. Angus Robinson, while Bill Davis, a son of my informant, acted as a guide. The swamp was situated between Lake Mealup and the southern shore of Peel Inlet and is locally known as Tuekey's Swamp or the Greenland Duck Pool.

We approached the swamp from the north-east through dense undergrowth, into a dried-up reed-bed. On the south-western side of the reed-bed we came into a thicket of tea-tree (*Melaleuca lamulosa*) in which were hundreds of nests from about four to six feet off the ground. During the breeding season these trees would be standing in water as proved by the aerial roots some 12 inches or more above the ground. Here and there on the fringe of the thicket were open spaces with odd stunted paper-barks (*Melaleuca parviflora*), which were also full of nests up to 10 feet from the ground. On examination of some of the many hundreds of nests, many of which had been used last season, we found the remains of several young birds. Most of these could be identified as Little Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucus*) and it was quite obvious that in a number of cases well-grown young had died in the nests. There were also odd Little Black Cormorants (*P. sulcirostris*) but we found no sign of any remains which could positively be identified as those of Straw-necked Ibis. Bill Davis said, however, that the only time he had seen the nesting colony was in September 1947 and at that time the Ibis were nesting in company with the Cormorants. If the Ibis had not nested there since most of the remains would have disappeared.

After careful search among the broken egg-shells in some old nests we picked up two pieces which were compared by Dr. Serventy and Mr. Robinson with eggs of the White Ibis (*T. aethiopica*) in Mr. Robinson's collection. The fragments we found could be superimposed perfectly on these eggs, proving that the original eggs must have been similar in form and size. There was similarity also in texture. There was little doubt the fragments were portions of Straw-necked Ibis eggs.

Many of the nests which had been in use in 1948 were notable for the mulberry colour of the ordure on their sides and the remains of jilgies and crabs inside. All remains of young birds

on the ground lacked heads; this appeared to be evidence of the activity of foxes.

—T. M. SMITH, "Ardersier," Coolup.

The Little Whimbrel in South-western Australia.—In *The Birds of Western Australia* (Serventy and Whittell, 1948) the authors state that this species "has not been recorded south of North-west Cape, but as in the case of most of these rarer migratory shore-birds, it should be watched for anywhere in the State." I would like to place on record an occurrence this year of a single bird on my property at Coolup.

On March 14, 1949, I arrived back at "Yanjettee" after three weeks absence, during which period most of the swamps had dried out, and, except for the far southern swamps there was no surface water. There had been approximately one inch of rain in the week before I arrived back, but this had not left any surface water. The temperature was below normal. The big swamp to the north of the house was perfectly dry and had a crop of Japanese millet in the centre about three inches high. The millet covered about four acres and was surrounded by green couch and paspalum, while the rises around the swamp were covered in dry grass.

On my first visit to the swamp I noticed a brown bird among the grazing cattle in the millet field. It appeared quite at home and I just dismissed it as a Banded Plover which species is frequently seen in the area. It was not until March 20 that I realised the bird was a Little Whimbrel (*Numenius minutus*). It was very quiet and was difficult to flush except when hard-pressed; then it rose with a harsh cry and settled down a short distance away. I watched the bird for some time with a pair of Ross 12 x 50 glasses, during which period the bird was often within 15 feet of me. The median line on the head was very noticeable as well as the down-curved bill of about 1½ to 2 inches in length. Its legs were olive-grey. In flight the upper part of the body was a uniform brown with a darker tip to the wings, and it showed no white rump whatsoever. It fed about in the grass picking up what appeared to be cut-worms or other grubs.

The bird stayed with us until April 15, the day after the first winter rain started. The period from March 14 till April 15 was marked by a spell of abnormally cool weather in March and abnormally hot in April. During the bird's stay I often flushed it, and though it generally remained in the millet patch, which was a light green in colour, it did on occasions take to the dry grass on the rises where it appeared just as much at home. It never at any time to my knowledge visited the southern swamps, which were within a quarter of a mile, though many waders were to be seen there including Wood-sandpipers, Greenshanks, White-headed Stilts and Black-fronted Dotterels. It really gave one the impression that grassland was its natural habitat—even to the way it crouched low in the grass on one's approach.

—ANGUS ROBINSON, "Yanjettee," Coolup.